2003-04 Warm Water Fish Management Activity Report

Region 3 (Bozeman)

DAILEY LAKE:

We continue to manage Dailey Lake as a mixed warm and cold water fishery. Principal fisheries are for wild (naturally recruited) yellow perch and stocked rainbow trout and walleye. This scheme seems to be working despite the fact that the lake level continues to drop due to the continued drought. Numbers, average size and condition of all three principal sport species continues to be maintained at desirable levels or is improving.

THREE FORKS PONDS:

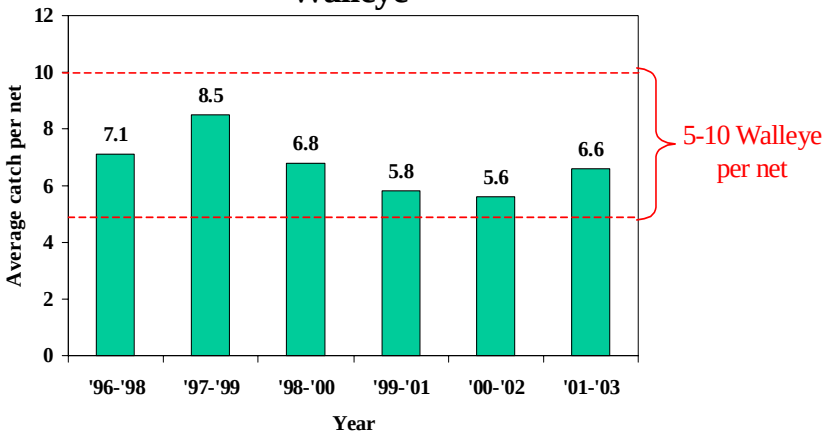
There continues to be a limited fishery for Largemouth bass and bluegills and/or yellow perch in all three ponds. We have made several attempts to remove some of the over abundant and consequently small bluegills for use as founder stock in other ponds and lakes elsewhere in the state. To date we have never been able to make that happen primarily due to the concern for the potential of unintentionally moving fish diseases and/or Aquatic Nuisance Species (such as New Zealand Mud Snails). We did permit an experimental carp seining operation in the west-most pond in an attempt to remove some of them and possibly improve water quality or at least clarity. The commercial fisherman tried it for one day but found out that the pond was too deep to fish effectively with his seine so he abandoned the idea of further fishing operations there.

CANYON FERRY RESERVOIR:

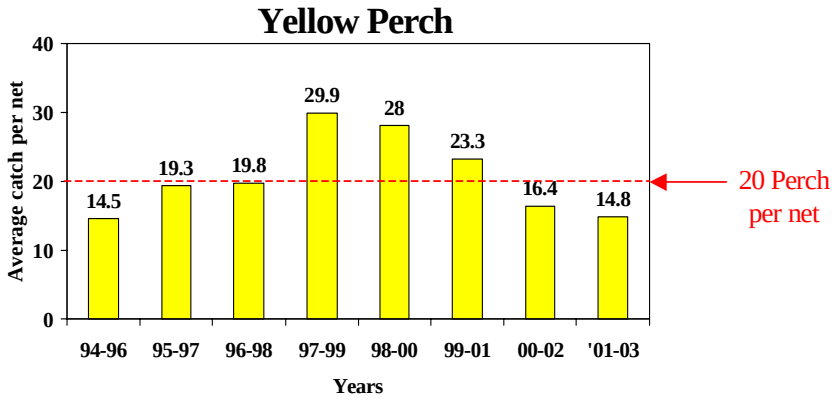
Although Canyon Ferry Reservoir (CFR) has its own Fishery Management Plan (Upper Missouri River Reservoirs Fishery Management Plan) we have, as a convenience, reported very briefly on it as part of the annual Warmwater Plan updates. As per the attached graphs, the situation at CFR is fairly easy to sum up. Walleyes are doing very well (stable to increasing), yellow perch are doing OK, and rainbow trout (most of which are stocked) are doing very poorly due to poor survival in the reservoir. We know that both walleye and birds eat stocked trout, and have evidence that suggests walleye do so at a rate that is probably a significant barrier to survival/recruitment of the trout. We plan to do intensified sampling on the bird (cormorant and pelican) nesting grounds to develop a better understanding of the level of significance their predation has on stocked trout.

Canyon Ferry
Species Goals and Three-year Trends

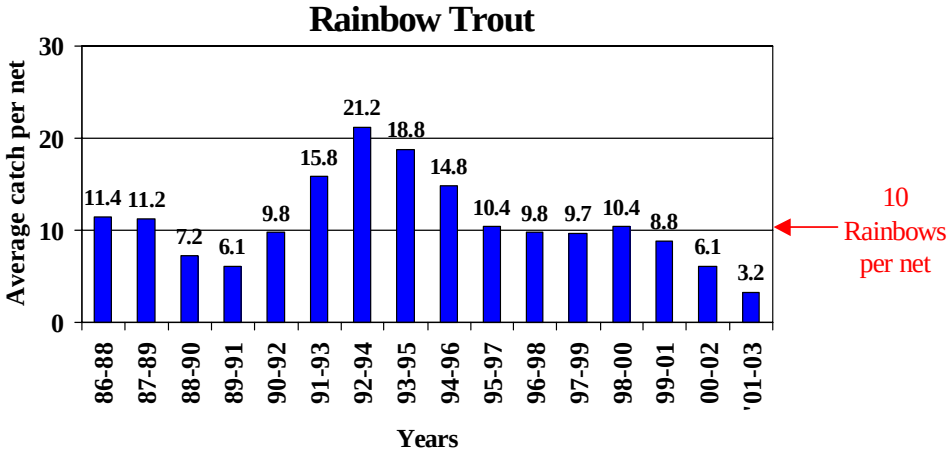
Walleye



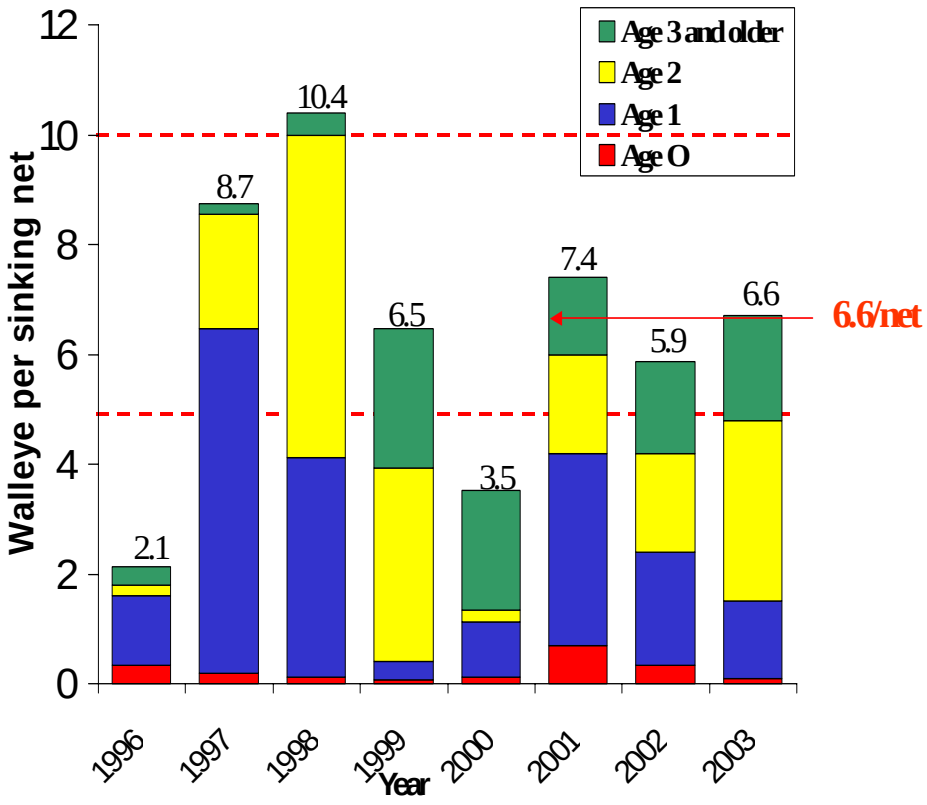
Yellow Perch



Rainbow Trout



Canyon Ferry Walleye Trend



•Average catch of 6.6 walleye per fall sinking net in 2003.

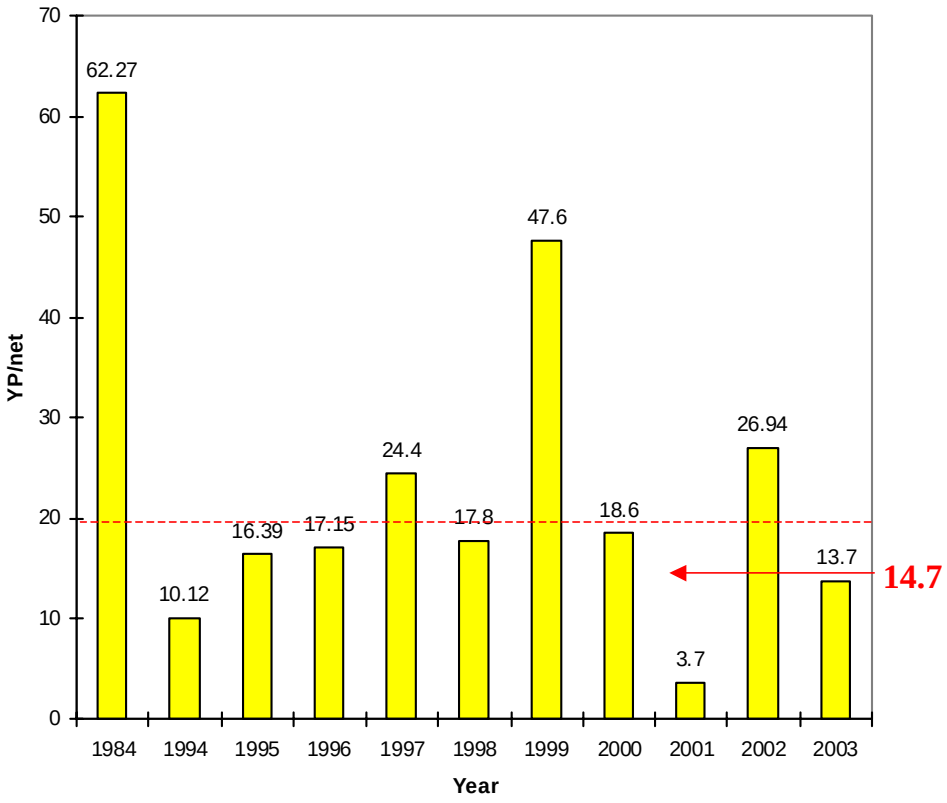
•Three-year running average is currently 6.6 walleye per net.

•If the three-year average catch falls below 5 walleye per net, more restrictive walleye regulations will be implemented. If the three-year average goes above 10 walleye per net, more liberal walleye management will be employed.

•Most fish caught in 2003 were between 15-19.9" (Age 2). Fish from this age class are the first progeny from the large '96-'97 age classes. The '96-'97 year-classes fully recruited to the spawning population in 2001.

•Overall condition for walleye <20" was lower in 2003, which likely accounts for high angler catch rates for walleye in this size range. Low condition (relative weight) might be a function of limited forage in the reservoir.

Canyon Ferry Perch Trends



•Management goal for yellow perch is to maintain a three-year average of 20 perch per sinking net.

•Current three-year average is 14.7 perch per net.

•2001 catch rate of 3.7 perch per net is all time low for this series (conducted since 1955).

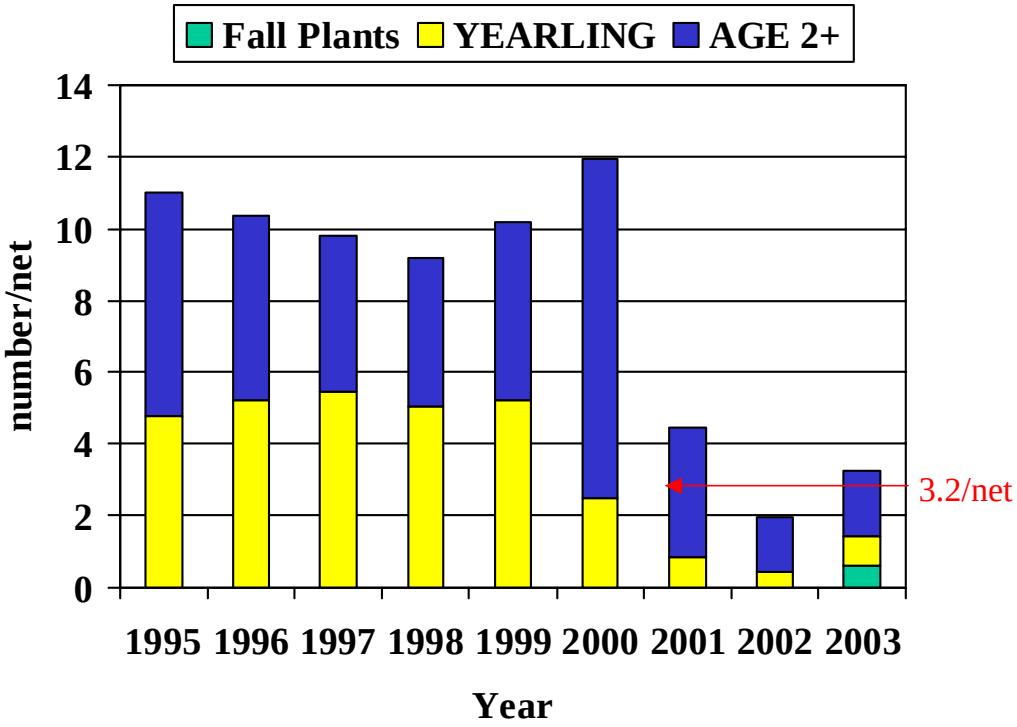
•Large 2001 year class produced the jump in numbers from 2001 to 2002.

•The 2001 year-class did not recruit like expected in 2003, resulting in 13.7 perch per net.

•Perch habitat improvement projects will continue on Canyon Ferry.

Canyon Ferry Rainbow Trend

Fall Floating Nets



•Current three-year average of 3.2 rainbows per fall floating net is well below the management goal of 10 rainbows per net.

•Since 1995, there was a direct relationship between the number of fish planted in the spring and the number of yearlings caught in fall nets. In 2000, the number of yearling caught in fall nets declined significantly, even though similar numbers of fish were planted that spring—spring plants were not surviving.

•Starting in 2003, FWP stocked larger, 8” fish in the spring and fall. In previous years, 5-6” fish were stocked

•Stocked 125,300 rainbows in the spring and 88,800 in the fall. Number stocked below target of 150,000 each season due to hatchery problems.

•Due to these stocking changes, both spring and fall netting series will be used to monitor stocking survival.

•It is currently unknown if management goals of 10 rainbows per net can be maintained.